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STATE SENATE TO U.S. SENATE: FREE THE MICHIGAN FOUR!

Resolution Urging Action Introduced, Expected to Pass

LANSING, July 8, 2003 -- A judicial crisis is worsening for the people of the state of Michigan, and the Michigan State Senate is urging the United States Senate to act, the chairman of the Senate's Judiciary Committee said today.

Sen. Alan Cropsey, R-DeWitt, said that four Michigan judgeships are being used as pawns in a partisan political game by U.S. Sens. Carl Levin and Debbie Stabenow.

In response, Cropsey and three colleagues have drafted a resolution urging the United States Senate to overcome Levin and Stabenow's obstruction and partisan antics and fulfill its Constitutional duty to vote on the nominations.

"It's unconscionable that these four fine Michigan jurists have been kept in limbo for so long," said Sen. Alan Cropsey, lead sponsor of the resolution. "Not only is it harming the lives and careers of qualified judicial nominees, but it is also prolonging a dire emergency in the administration of justice. We urge the full U.S. Senate to take action on these nominees, because our own Senators have proven they will not."

"We're determined that Michigan does not lose its voice on the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals," added Sen. Alan Sanborn. "With this resolution, we will indicate our full support of the U.S. Senate to overcome the obstacles our home-state Senators have put in their way. And, we intend to make clear to Senators Levin and Stabenow that while they may have their partisan political games to play, the people back home in Michigan want justice done -- for the Michigan Four, and for ourselves."

For nearly two years, Levin and Stabenow have taken the unprecedented step of blocking these nominees from their home state -- a procedure rarely used in modern times, and never for nominees to the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals -- until now.

In response, the leadership of the U.S. Senate took similarly unprecedented steps last night to discharge the Michigan Four nominations and bring them directly to the full Senate for a vote, bypassing Levin and Stabenow's historic obstruction.

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"These four Michigan judges are highly qualified and deserve to have a hearing before the Senate, but Senators Stabenow and Levin won't even allow them to be considered," pointed out resolution co-sponsor Senator Mike Bishop. "They are holding these judges hostage, so we are asking the full U.S. Senate to free them by bringing their nominations to the full Senate for consideration."

Cropsey pointed out that while the nominations languish, the court is falling behind. It takes 40% longer than average for the 6th Circuit to complete a case. Half of the court's 16 seats are now empty. And, Cropsey said, if the blocks on the four Michigan nominees are not overcome, the seats reserved for Michigan judges may have to be filled by judges from Ohio or Kentucky -- depriving Michigan of its representation on this very important court.

Resolution co-sponsor Senator Bruce Patterson noted: "As important as it is to have Michigan nominees sitting on this court, it is just as important that the 6th Circuit be able to function well in order to serve all citizens who come before it. In this regard, Levin and Stabenow's unheard-of blocks of these nominees does a great disservice not only to their own constituents, but to a significant portion of the country."

Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema said he expects the resolution to be passed fairly quickly after the Senate returns from recess.

"Michigan's representation in the federal judicial system is too important to sacrifice for partisan politics," said Sikkema. "I am grateful the U.S. Senate has acted to do for the people of Michigan what its own U.S. Senators will not -- see to it that our courts can dispense justice swiftly and accurately. These are outstanding nominees and the full Senate deserves a chance to consider them."

The "Michigan Four" judges being held at bay for partisan gamesmanship are: Richard Griffin, Michigan Court of Appeals; David McKeague, U.S. District Court, Western District of Michigan; Susan Bieke Neilson, Circuit Court, Wayne County, Michigan; and Henry Saad, Michigan Court of Appeals.